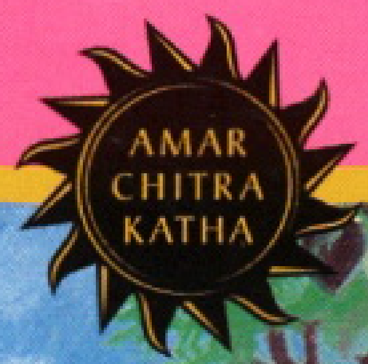


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Dhruva and Ashtavakra



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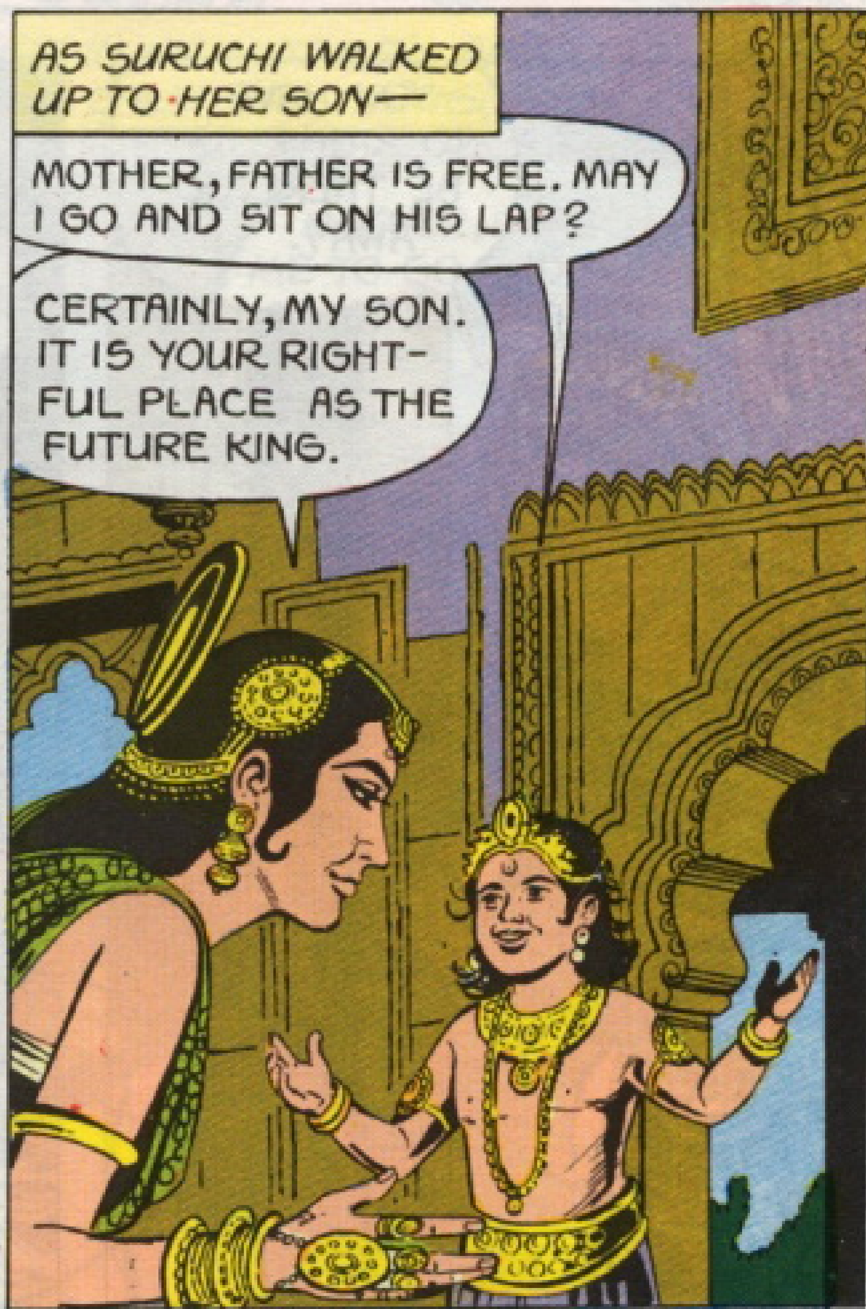
INDIA BOOK HOUSE

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DHRUVA

DHRUVA WAS THE SON OF SUNEETI, THE SENIOR QUEEN OF KING UTTANAPADA. UNFORTUNATELY FOR DHRUVA AND SUNEETI, UTTANAPADA LOVED SURUCHI, HIS SECOND QUEEN, BETTER AND WAS PARTIAL TO HER.





WHEN DHRUVA SAW UTTAMA SITTING ON UTTANAPADA'S LAP, HE RAN TOWARDS THEM.

I TOO WILL SIT ON MY FATHER'S LAP.

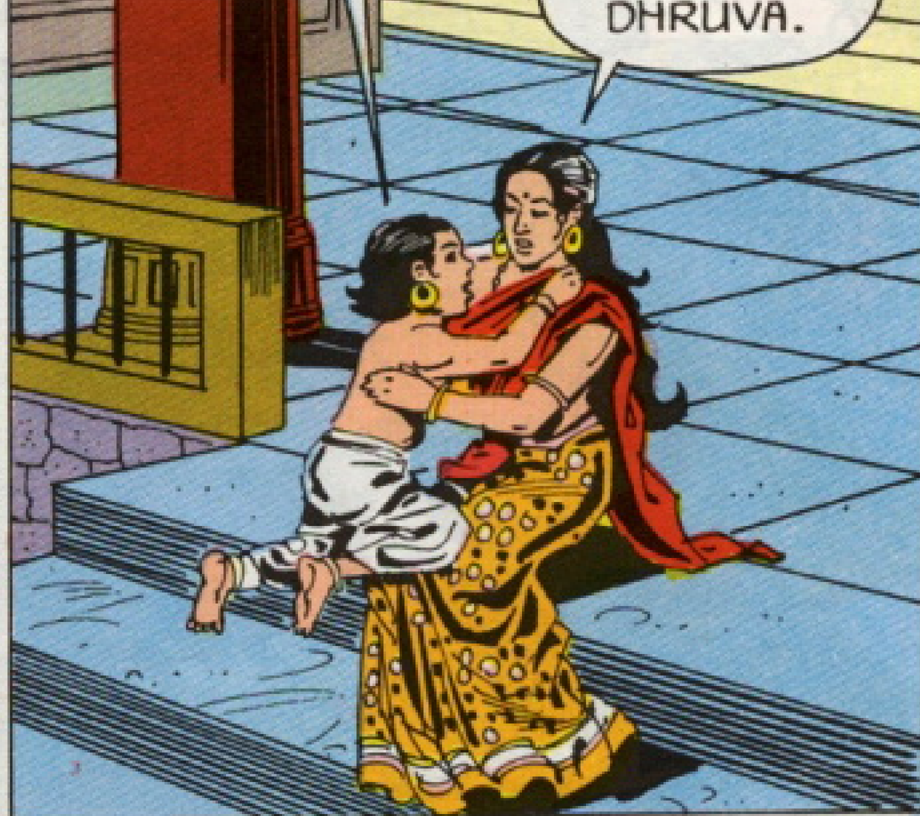
CERTAINLY NOT!





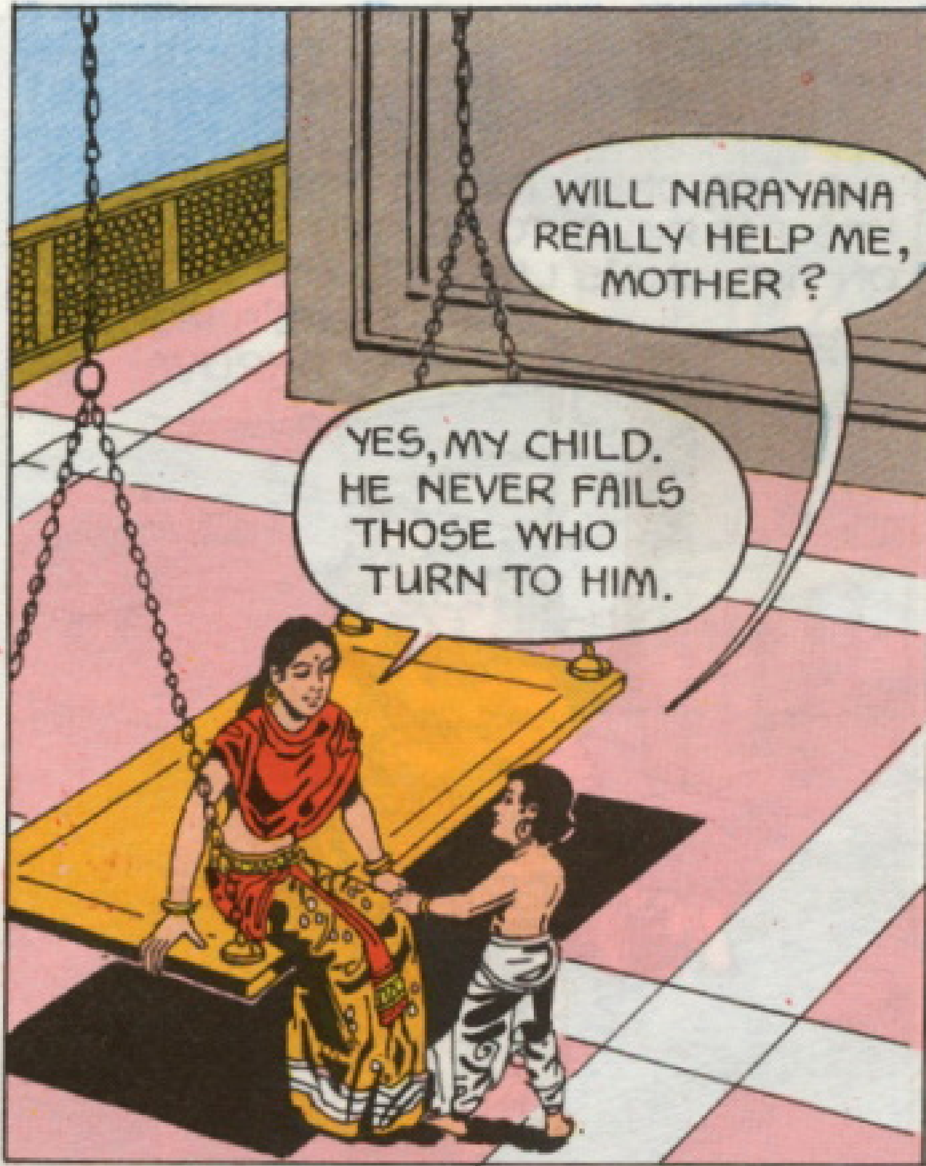
*ANOTHER NAME FOR VISHNU.


STUNG BY HER WORDS, DHRUVA RAN CRYING TO HIS MOTHER.
WHY ARE YOU CRYING, DHRUVA? HAS ANYONE HURT YOU?
MOTHER SURUCHI SAID I HAD NO RIGHT TO SIT ON MY FATHER'S LAP.


SHE SAID ONLY UTTAMA HAD THE RIGHT TO SIT ON THE KING'S LAP.
SHE'S RIGHT, DHRUVA.


HOLDING BACK HER TEARS, SUNEETI HUGGED HIM AND CARRIED HIM IN.
I AM A KSHATRIYA PRINCE, AM I NOT, MOTHER?
YES, MY CHILD.


SECURE IN HIS MOTHER'S ARMS, DHRUVA BECAME CALM AND THOUGHTFUL.
MOTHER, SURUCHI TOLD ME TO GO AND SEEK LORD NARAYANA'S FAVOUR IF I WANT TO SIT ON MY FATHER'S LAP.


WILL NARAYANA REALLY HELP ME, MOTHER ?
YES, MY CHILD. HE NEVER FAILS THOSE WHO TURN TO HIM.


THEN I SHALL SEEK HIM OUT.


GO, MY SON. HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP US. IT WILL NOT BE EASY TO FIND HIM. BUT IF YOU TRY HARD ENOUGH YOU WILL SUCCEED.


I WILL SUCCEED, MOTHER. I WILL NOT RETURN TILL I MEET THE LORD. I WILL BECOME A GREATER KING THAN MY FATHER OR HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM.

MEANWHILE, SAGE NARADA CAME TO KNOW ABOUT SURUCHI'S HARSH WORDS AND DHRUVA'S RESOLVE.

HE IS A TRUE KSHATRIYA INDEED. THOUGH A MERE CHILD, HE WILL NOT BROOK THE INSULTS OF HIS STEP-MOTHER. YET WHAT HE SEEKS IS IMPOSSIBLE. I MUST SPEAK TO HIM.

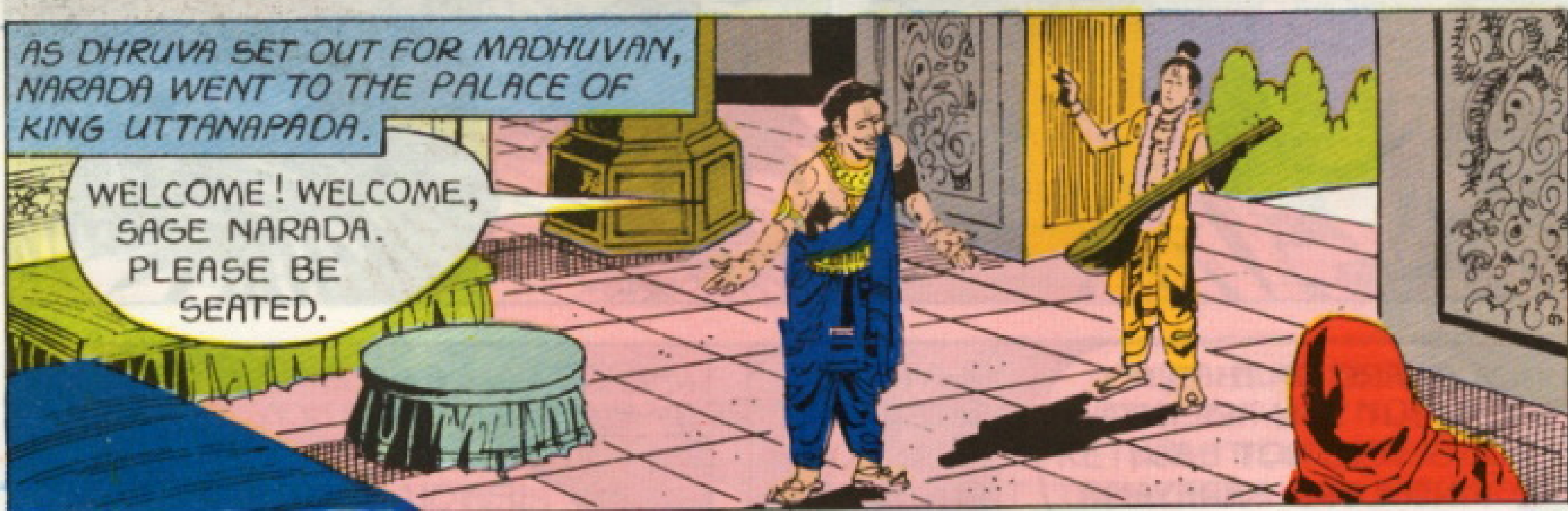










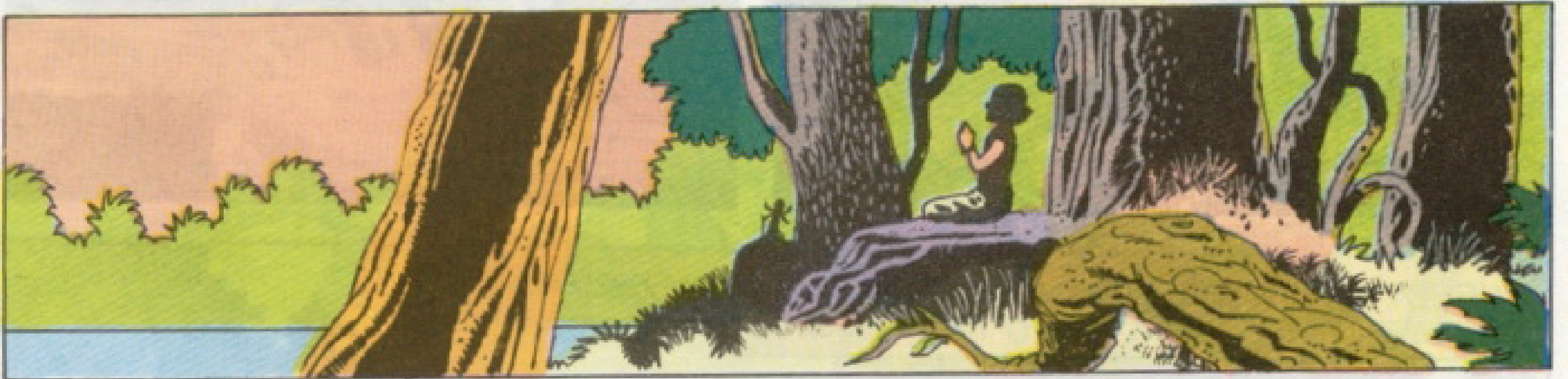






* I BOW TO THE REVERED VASUDEVA (VISHNU).


MEANWHILE, DHRUVA HAD REACHED MADHUVAN.
I SHALL SIT HERE AND BEGIN MY MEDITATION.




IN THE FIRST MONTH, HE LIVED ONLY ON THE FRUITS HE COULD FIND IN THE FOREST.


GRADUALLY HE GAVE UP EVEN THAT AND ATE ONLY GRASS AND LEAVES.


IN THE THIRD MONTH, HE STOPPED EATING AND LIVED ONLY ON WATER.

IN THE FOURTH MONTH, HE GAVE UP EVEN THAT AND LIVED ON AIR. THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD HE REPEATED THE MANTRA OVER AND OVER AGAIN.



IN THE FIFTH AND SIXTH MONTHS, HE EVEN STOPPED BREATHING.



DHRUVA'S CONCENTRATION STOPPED THE VERY AIR FROM FLOWING. THERE WAS PANIC IN HEAVEN...

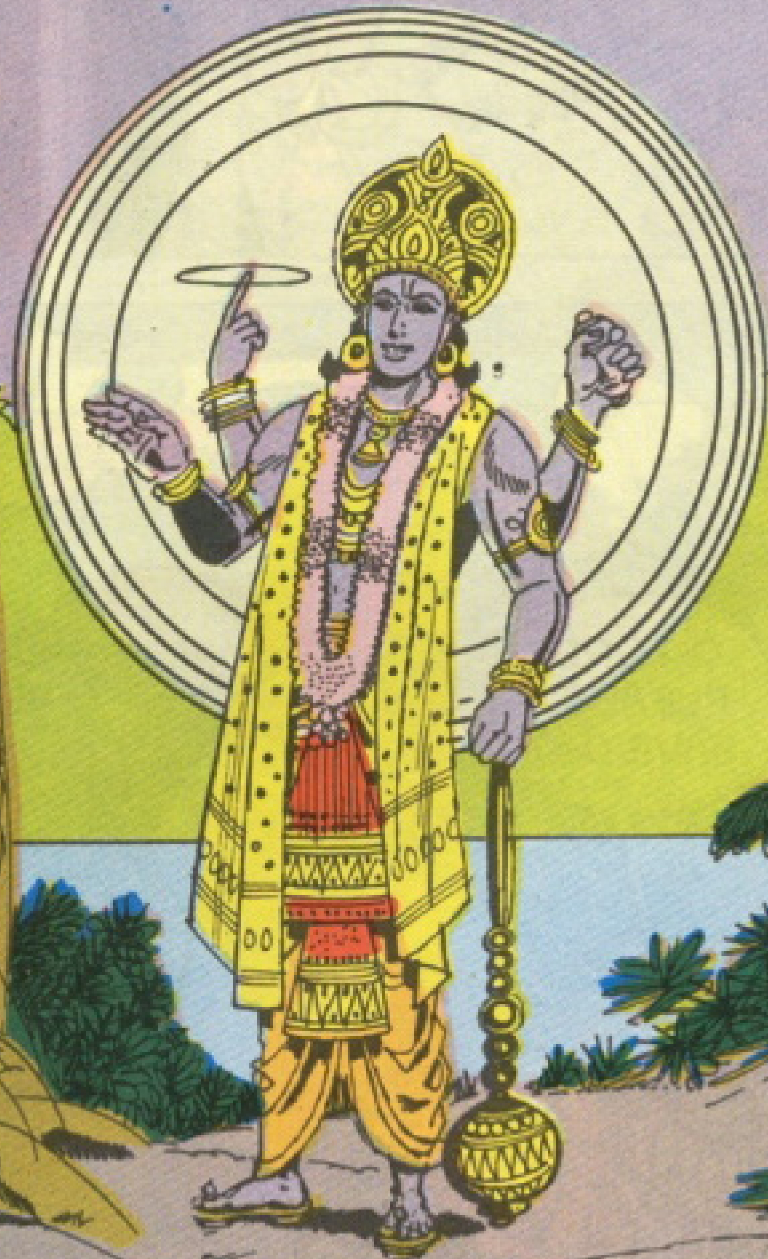




O LORD, PLEASE SAVE US.

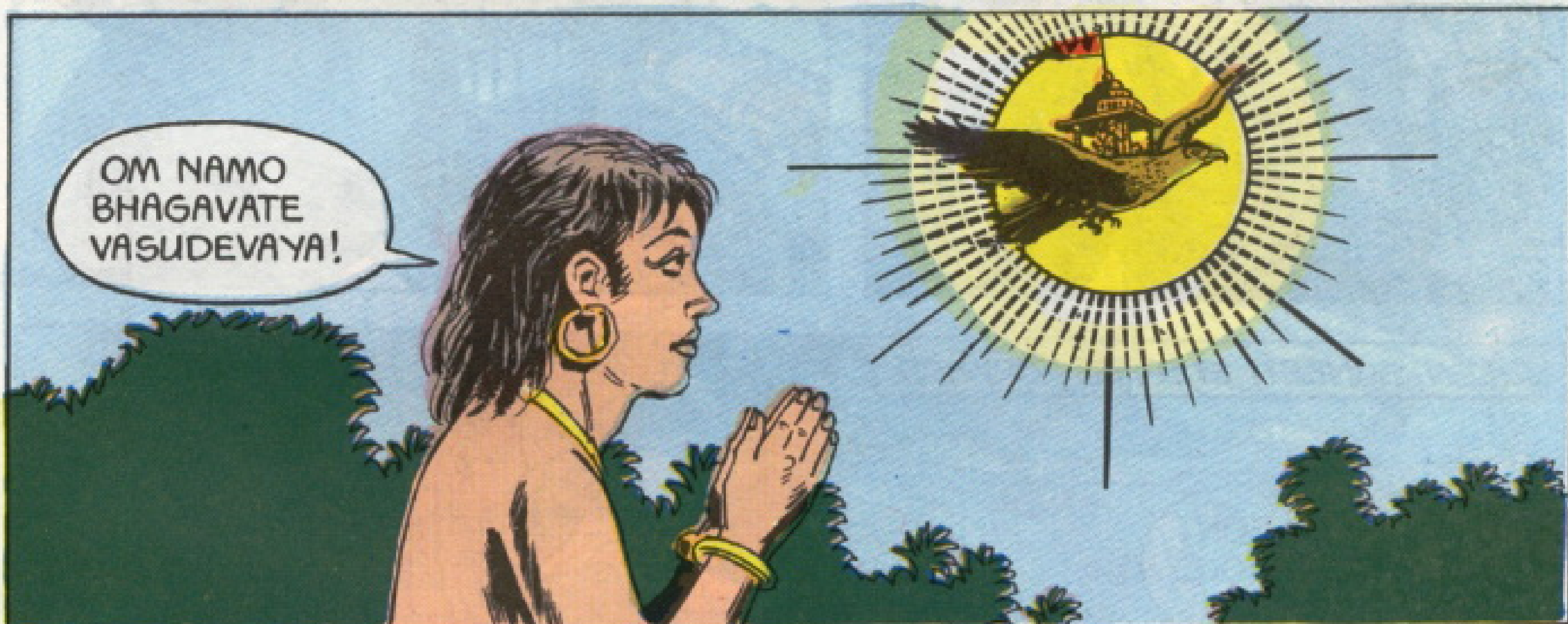
DO NOT DESPAIR. I SHALL DESCEND TO EARTH AND GRANT DHRUVA THE BOON HE SEEKS.

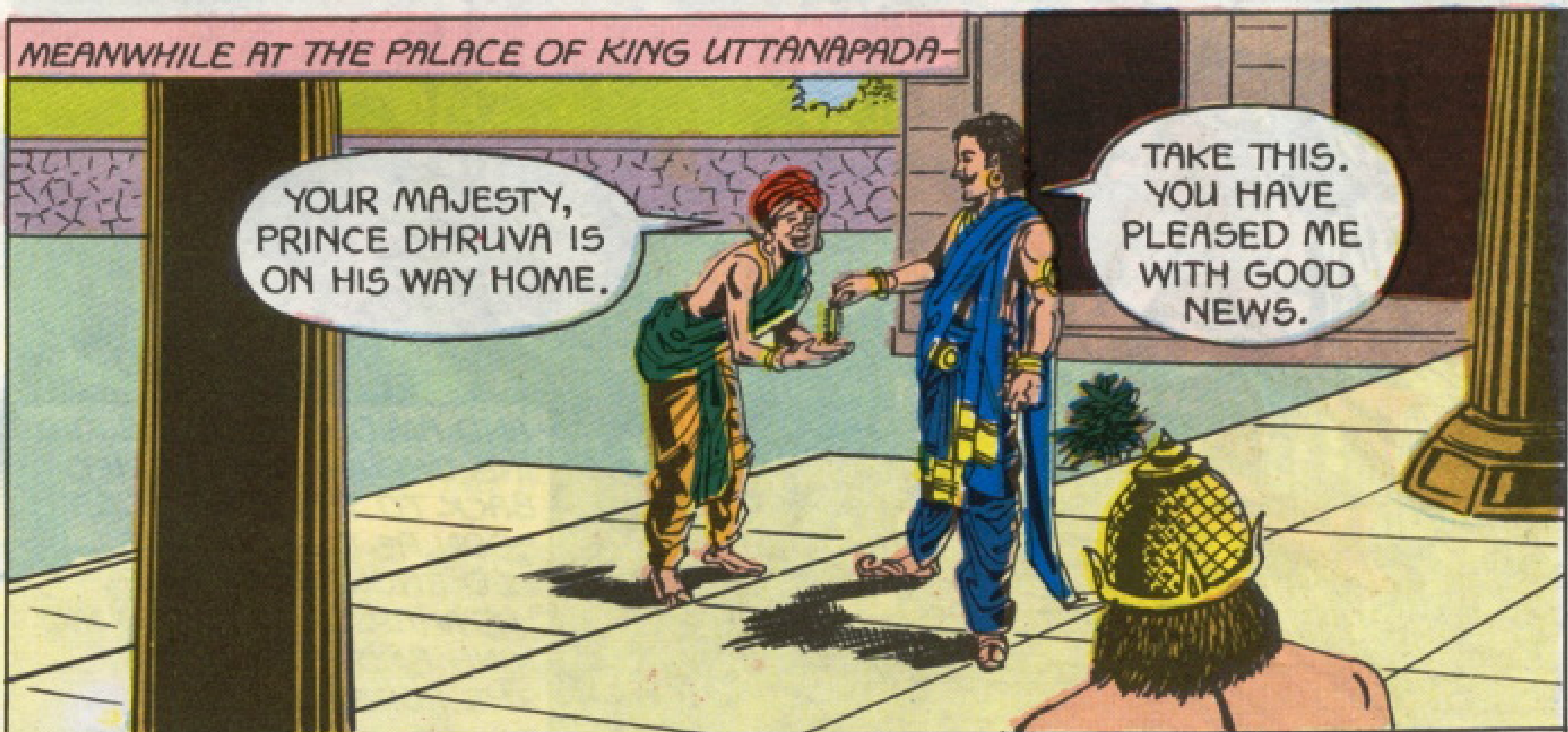

MEANWHILE, AS DHRUVA MEDITATED —
LORD, I THOUGHT I HAD FOUND YOU BUT YOU'VE SUDDENLY VANISHED. HAVE I FAILED IN MY WORSHIP? HAVE I DISPLEASED YOU? THEN I SHALL START MEDITATING ALL OVER AGAIN.


AND DHRUVA OPENED HIS EYES.
THE LORD HAS COME TO ME!



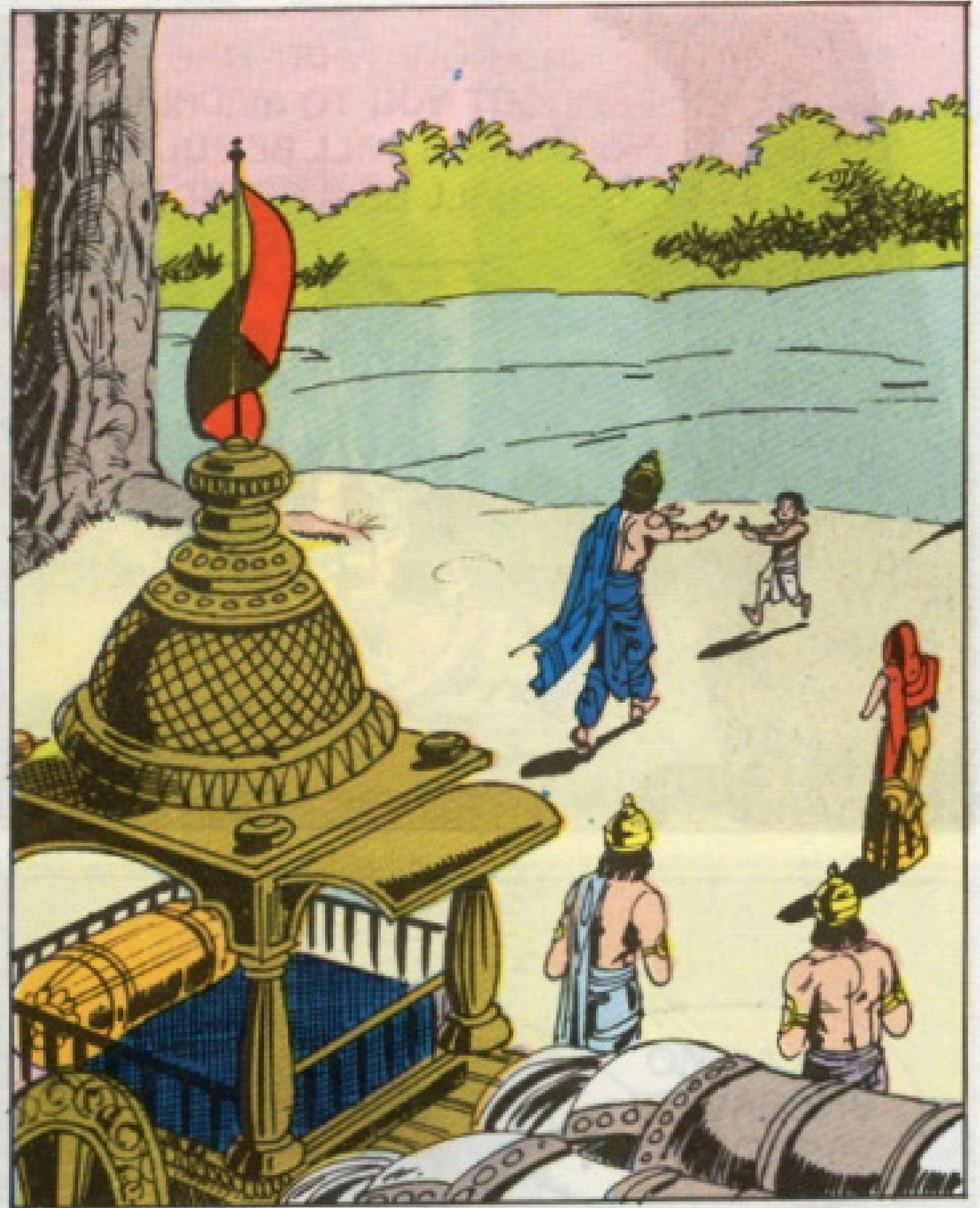






*THE POLE STAR TO THIS DAY IS KNOWN AS DHRUVA.





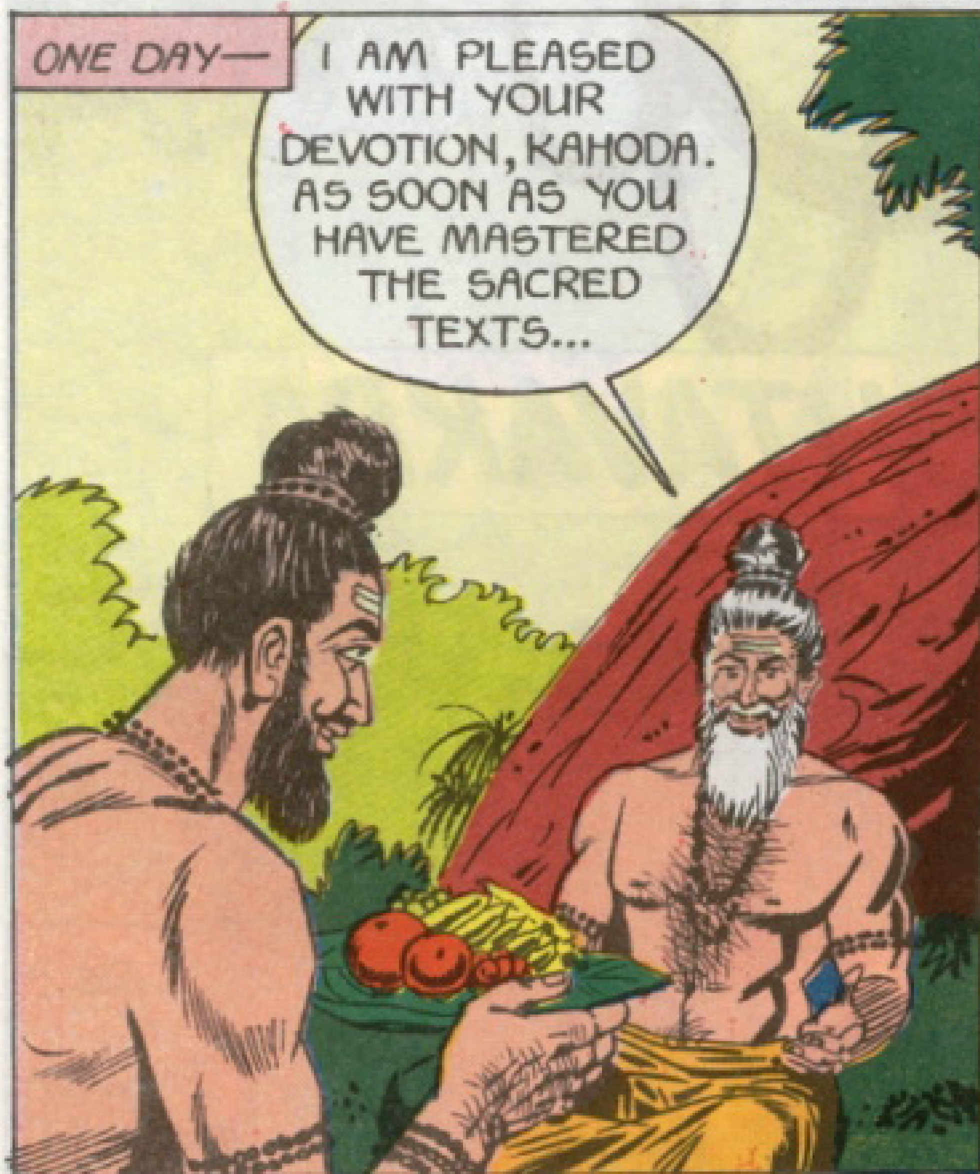
QUEEN SUNEETI STEPPED FORWARD.

O MY SON, MY GLORIOUS SON!

AND AMIDST GREAT REJOICING, DHRUVA WAS CARRIED BACK TO THE PALACE. AS SOON AS DHRUVA WAS OLD ENOUGH TO RULE, UTTANAPADA CROWNED HIM KING AND RETIRED TO THE FOREST.

ASHTAVAKRA


KAHODA WAS THE FAVOURITE DISCIPLE OF UDDALAKA, A RENOWNED SCHOLAR IN THE VEDAS. UDDALAKA HAD A DAUGHTER CALLED SUJATA.





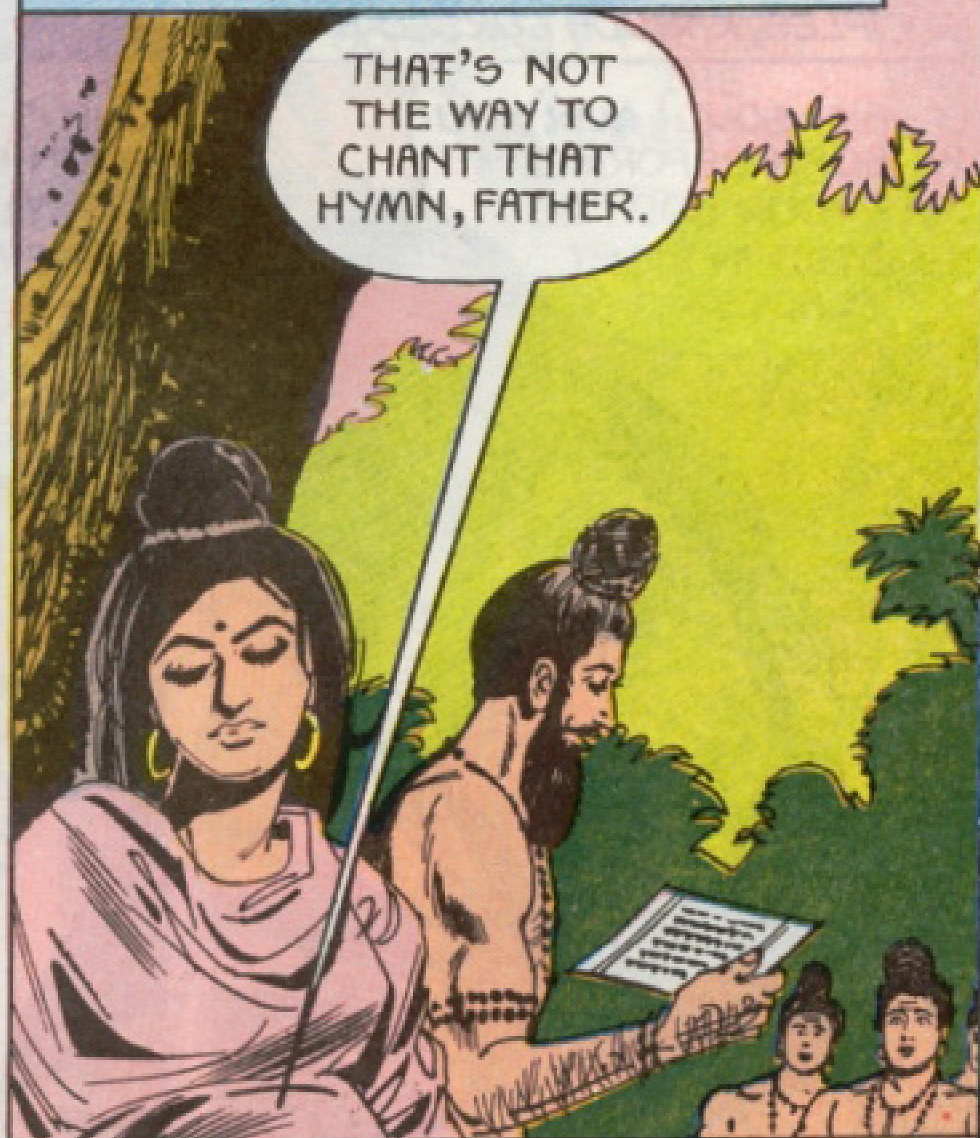
KAHODA WAS CLEVER AND HARD-WORKING AND SOON MASTERED THE TEXTS. AS HIS GURU HAD PROMISED HE WAS MARRIED TO SUJATA.

YOU MAY CONTINUE TO LIVE HERE AT THE ASHRAM, AND TEACH YOUR DISCIPLES.

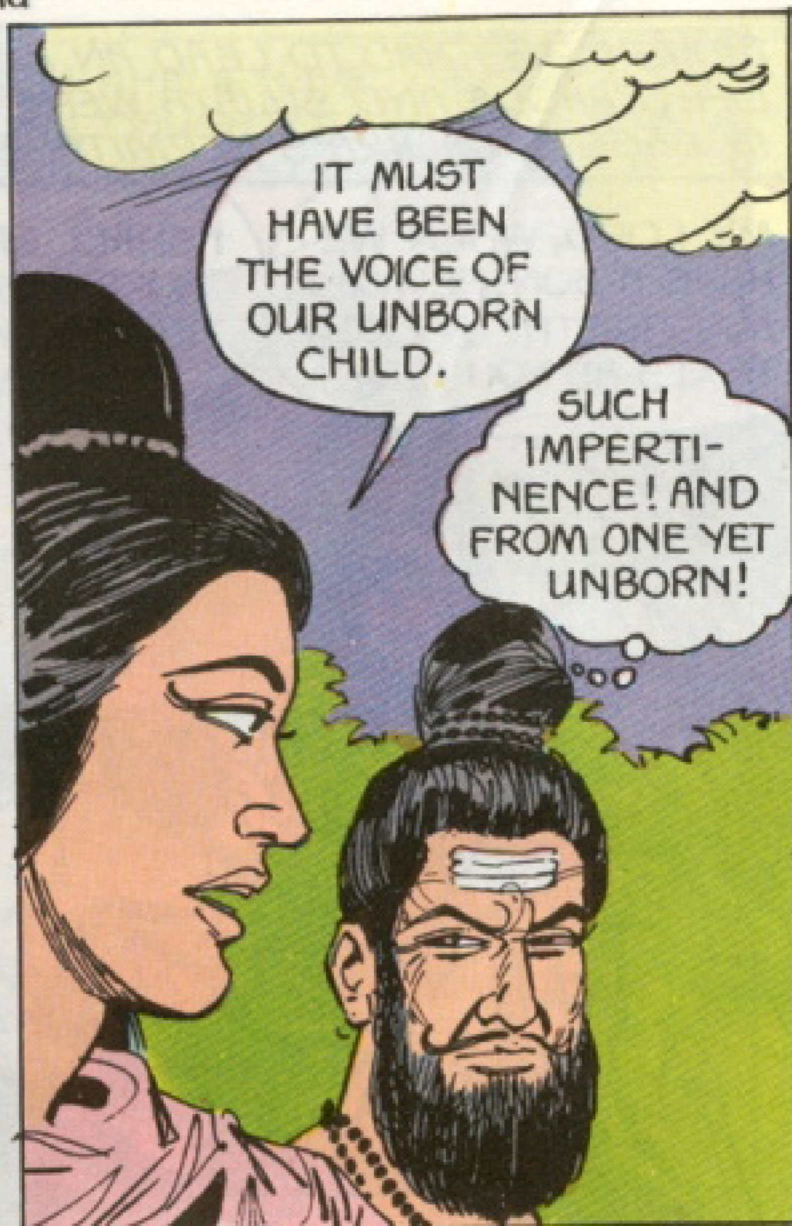

THOUGH THEY HAD TO LEAD AN AUSTERE LIFE, KAHODA AND SUJATA WERE HAPPY IN SAGE UDDALAKA'S HERMITAGE.
MY LORD, WHEN WE HAVE A SON, HE MUST MASTER THE SACRED TEXTS AS YOU HAVE.
I SHALL SPARE NO PAINS TO TEACH HIM ALL I KNOW.


A FEW MONTHS LATER, SUJATA BECAME PREGNANT.
I MUST EXPOSE MY CHILD TO THE SACRED INFLUENCE OF THE HYMNS EVEN WHILE HE IS IN THE WOMB.

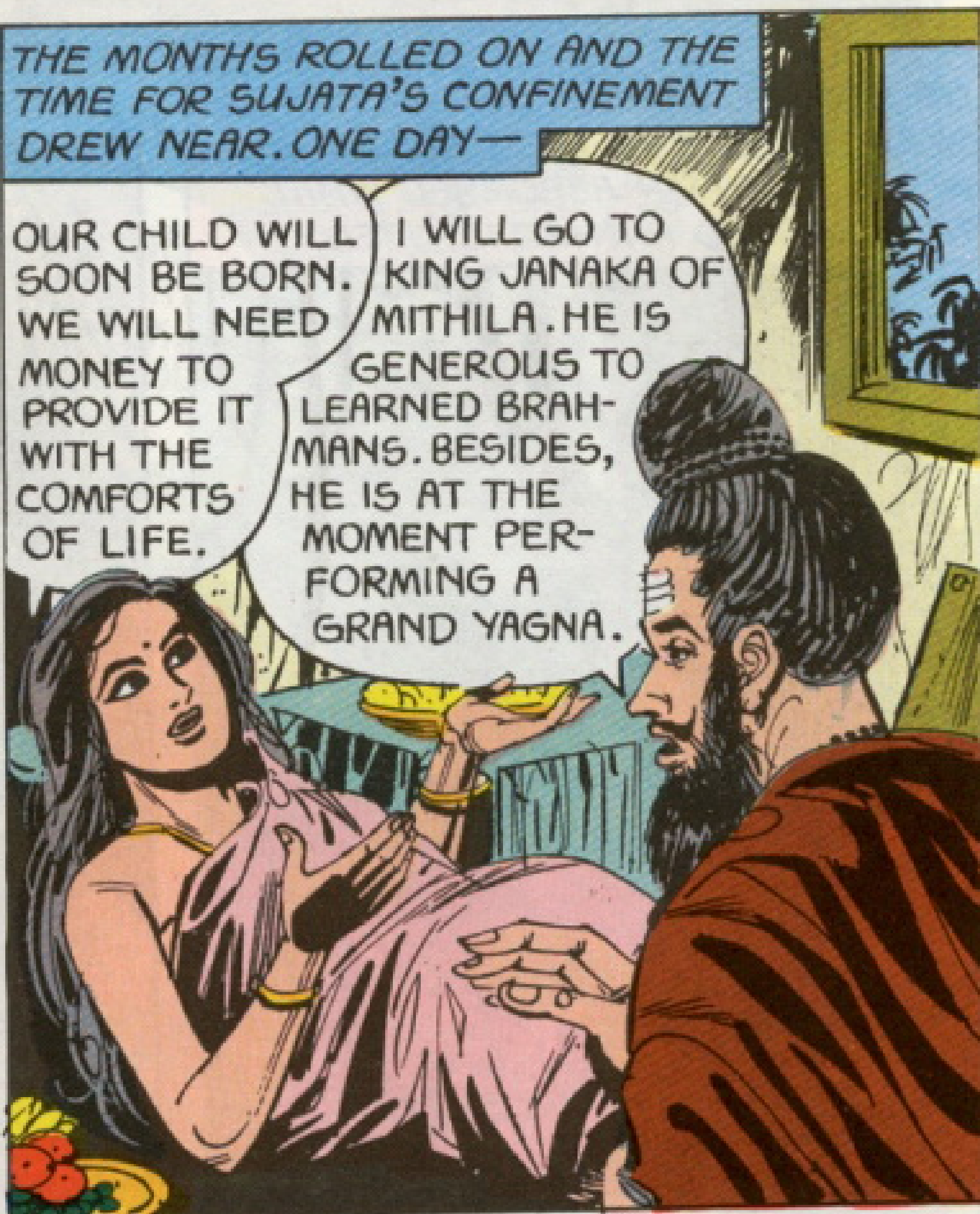

SO SUJATA SAT BY HER HUSBAND AS HE RECITED VERSES FROM THE SCRIPTURES; AND THE CHILD IN HER WOMB SILENTLY ABSORBED WHAT THE LEARNED FATHER RECITED.


ONE DAY AS KAHODA SAT AMONG HIS DISCIPLES, INSTRUCTING THEM—
THAT'S NOT THE WAY TO CHANT THAT HYMN, FATHER.


WHO WAS THAT? WHERE DID THAT VOICE COME FROM?


IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE VOICE OF OUR UNBORN CHILD.
SUCH IMPERTI-NENCE! AND FROM ONE YET UNBORN!


FURIOUS WITH HIS SON FOR PUT-TING HIM TO SHAME BEFORE HIS DISCIPLES, KAHODA CURSED HIM.
O VAIN SOUL! MAY YOU BE BORN DEFORMED— MAY YOUR BODY BE TWISTED IN EIGHT PLACES!


THE MONTHS ROLLED ON AND THE TIME FOR SUJATA'S CONFINEMENT DREW NEAR. ONE DAY—
OUR CHILD WILL SOON BE BORN. WE WILL NEED MONEY TO PROVIDE IT WITH THE COMFORTS OF LIFE.
I WILL GO TO KING JANAKA OF MITHILA. HE IS GENEROUS TO LEARNED BRAH-MANS. BESIDES, HE IS AT THE MOMENT PER-FORMING A GRAND YAGNA.


WHEN KAHODA REACHED MITHILA, JANAKA WELCOMED HIM.
O REVERED SAGE, YOU HAVE COME AT THE RIGHT MOMENT.

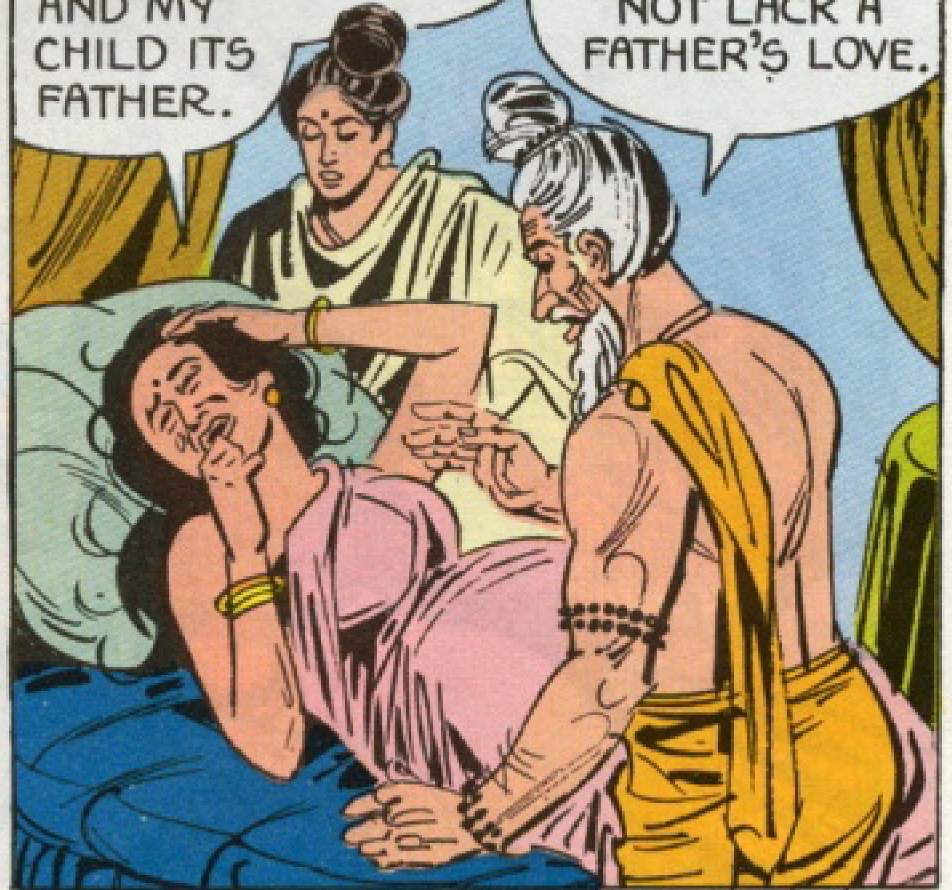

A SCHOLAR NAMED BANDHI HAS COME TO MITHILA. NO ONE CAN DEFEAT HIM IN DEBATE.
LET ME TRY, O KING.

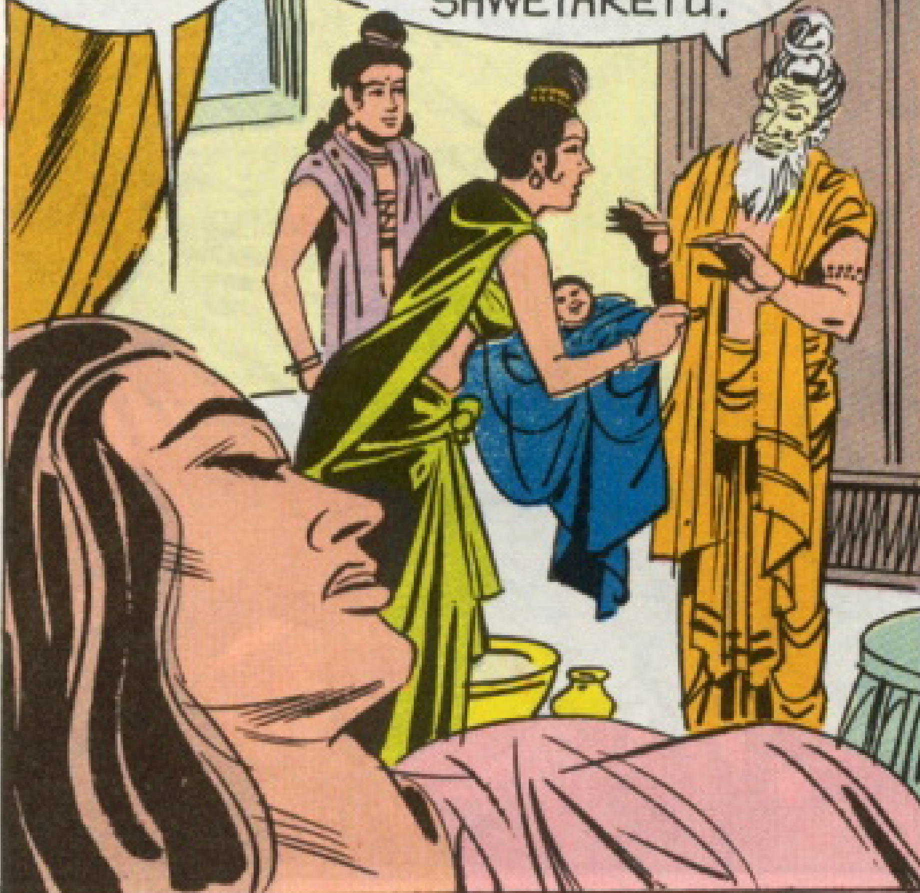

THINK IT OVER CAREFULLY. THOUGH YOU WILL BE WELL REWARDED IF YOU WIN...


...YOU WILL BE DROWNED IN THE RIVER IF YOU DON'T. AND MANY SCHOLARS HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES.
I ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE.


THE DEBATE BEGAN BUT DID NOT CONTINUE FOR LONG. KAHODA WAS NO MATCH FOR BANDHI.
BANDHI HAS WON AGAIN. POOR KAHODA WILL BE DROWNED LIKE ALL THE OTHERS.
BANDHI WAS TRIUMPHANT.
MY MISSION HERE IS PROVING TO BE VERY SUCCESSFUL. I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DISPATCH ONE MORE SAGE.









*CROOKED IN EIGHT PLACES.

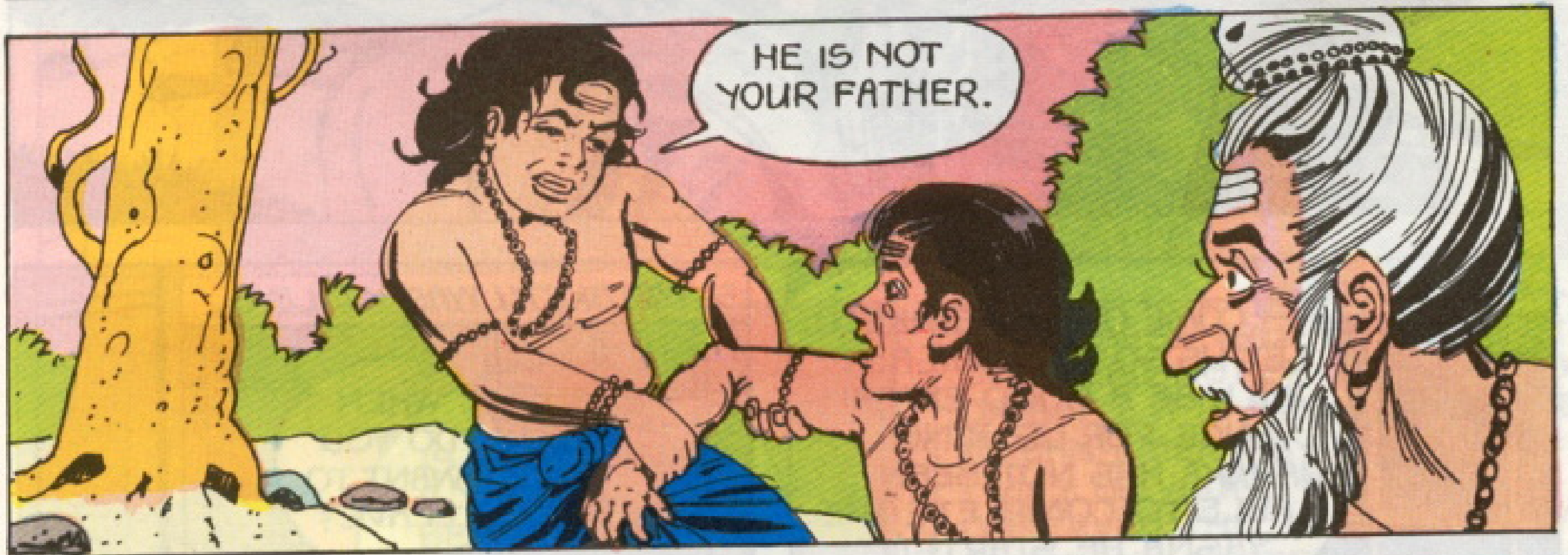




WHEN THE BOYS WERE TWELVE YEARS OLD—

YOU HAVE MASTERED THE VEDAS. I AM PROUD OF YOU, MY SON.


SUDDENLY—
YOU ARE NOT HIS SON!
FATHER!


HE IS NOT YOUR FATHER.


DEEPLY HUMILIATED, ASHTAVAKRA RAN TO HIS MOTHER.
MOTHER, WHERE IS MY FATHER? OH! WHY DO YOU WEEP? TELL ME!
YOUR FATHER IS DEAD.

AND SUJATA TOLD HIM ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED.

I MUST DEFEAT BANDHI AND HAVE HIM DROWNED.



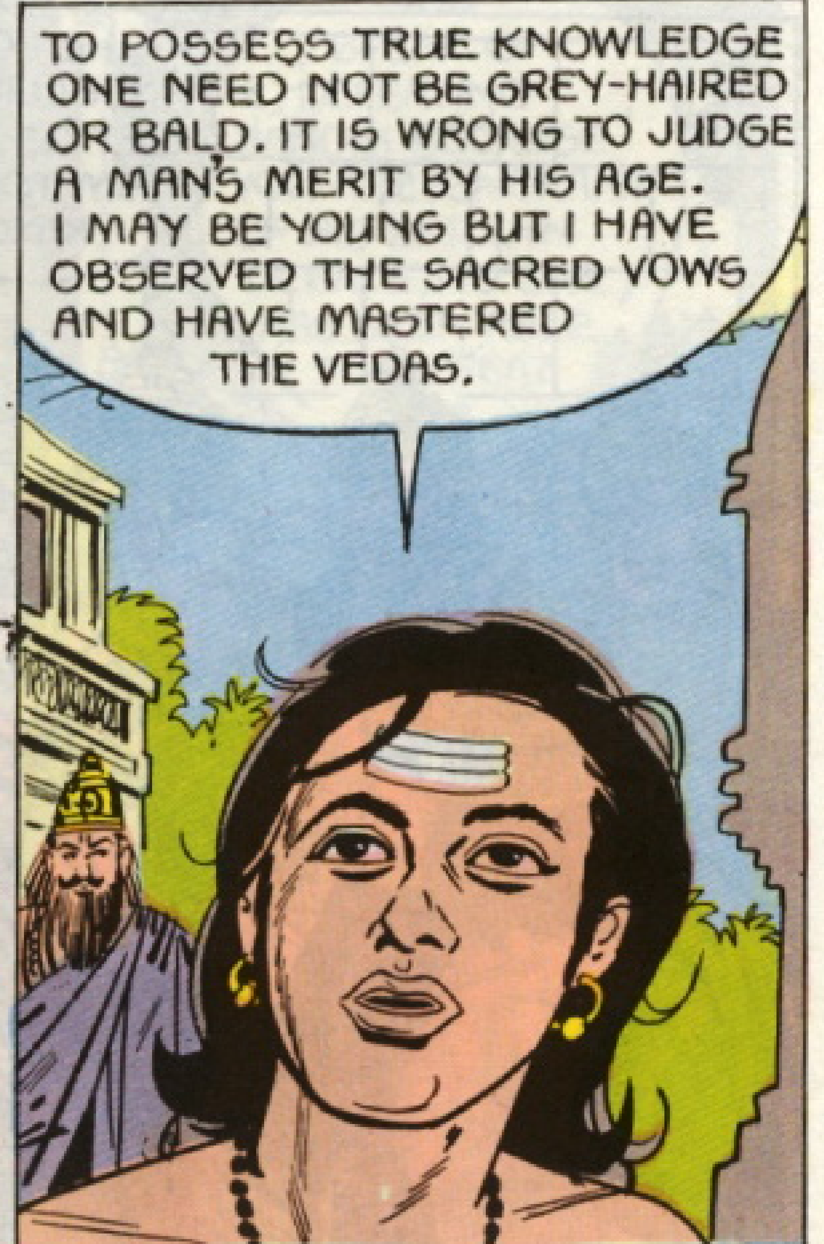


WHEN THE BOYS REACHED THE GATES OF JANAKA'S PALACE AT MITHILA—

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?

WE HAVE COME TO MEET THE KING. PLEASE TAKE US TO HIM.





I HAVE COME HERE TO CHALLENGE BANDHI. YOU CAN JUDGE MY MERITS AFTER I HAVE DEFEATED HIM IN A DEBATE. PLEASE TAKE ME TO THE KING.

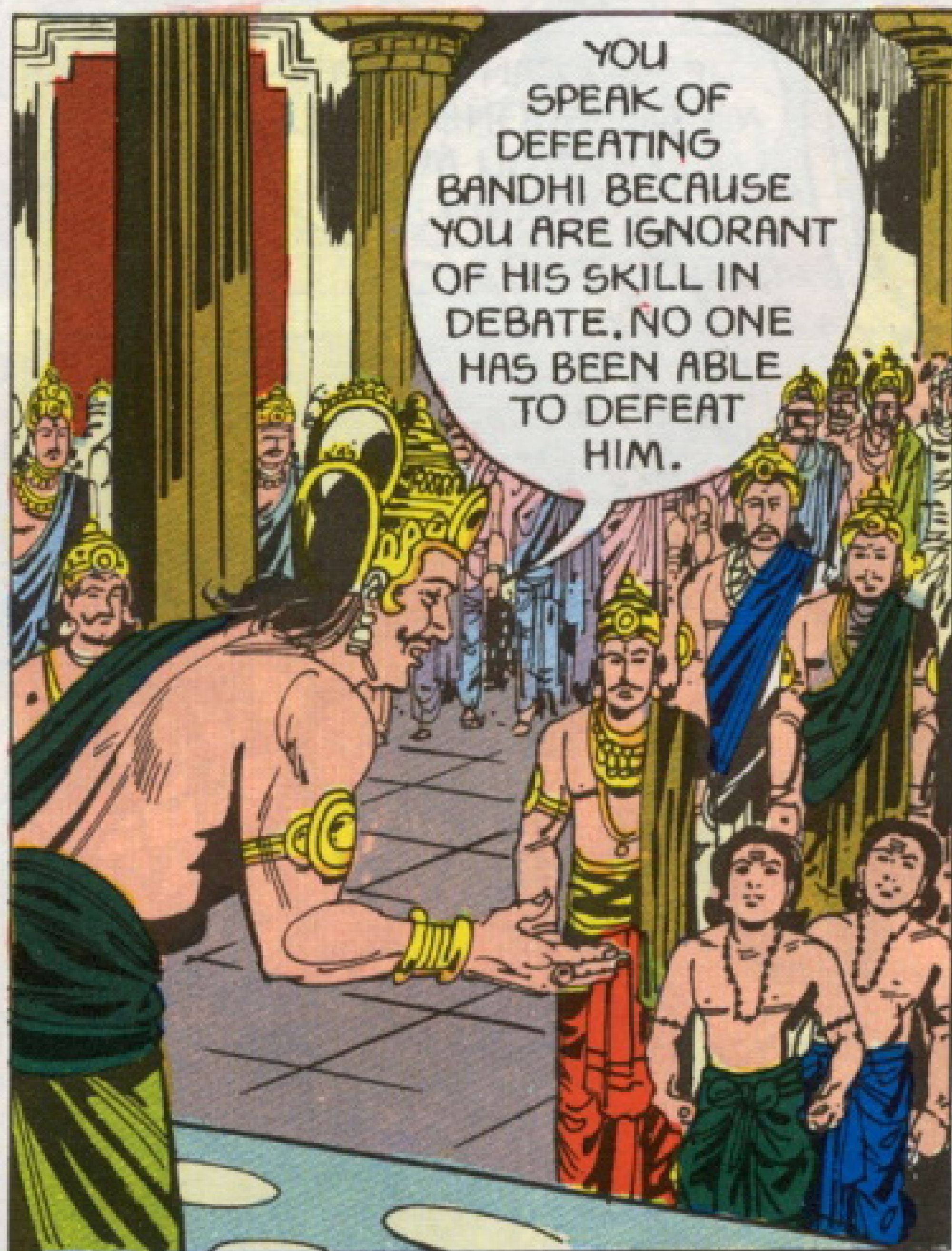
HE LOOKS INTELLIGENT. LET US TAKE HIM TO THE KING.

THE KING WILL BE DELIGHTED TO SEE HIM AND HEAR HIM TALK.

THE BOYS WERE TAKEN TO JANAKA.

O KING, I HAVE HEARD OF BANDHI'S CHALLENGE AND THE FATE OF THOSE WHO FAILED TO MEET IT. I HAVE COME TO CHALLENGE BANDHI AND TO SEE HIM DESTROYED.



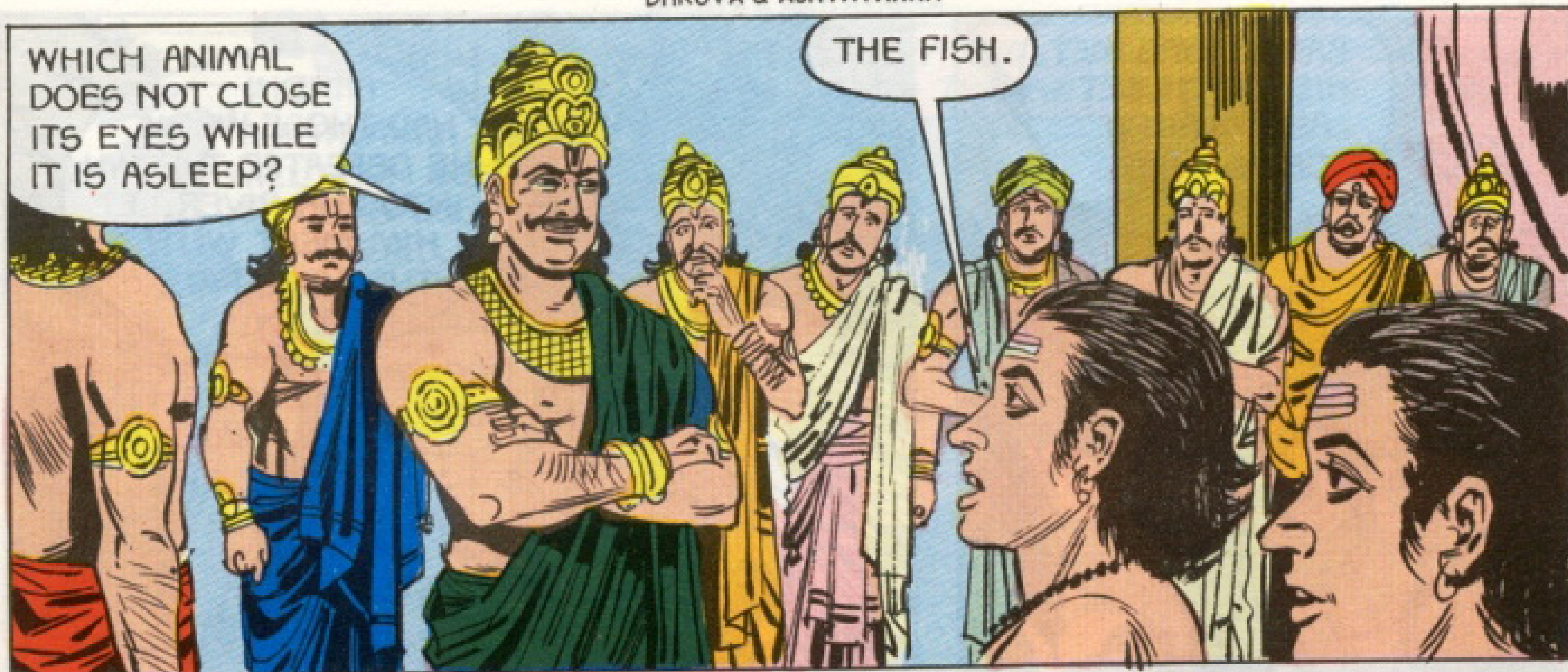



THAT'S BECAUSE HE WAS NEVER CONFRONTED WITH A SCHOLAR OF MY CALIBRE. I WILL NOT GO BACK TILL I SEE HIM DEFEATED AND DROWNED.

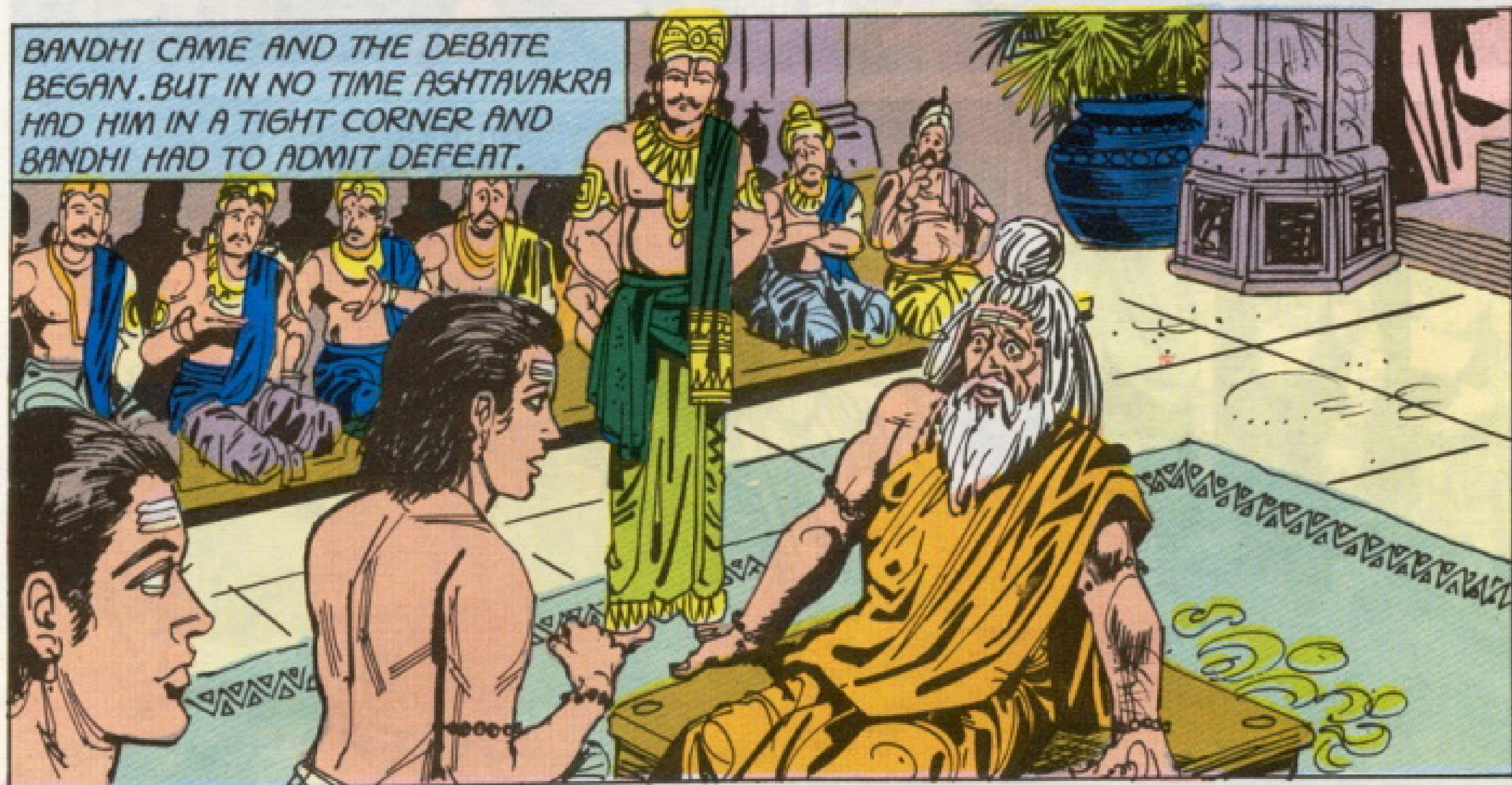

WHEN JANAKA SAW THAT ASHTAVAKRA WAS ADAMANT—
THE BOY IS CONFIDENT. I WILL TEST HIS INTELLIGENCE BY ASKING HIM A FEW QUESTIONS.


IF YOU CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS I WILL LET YOU MEET BANDHI.

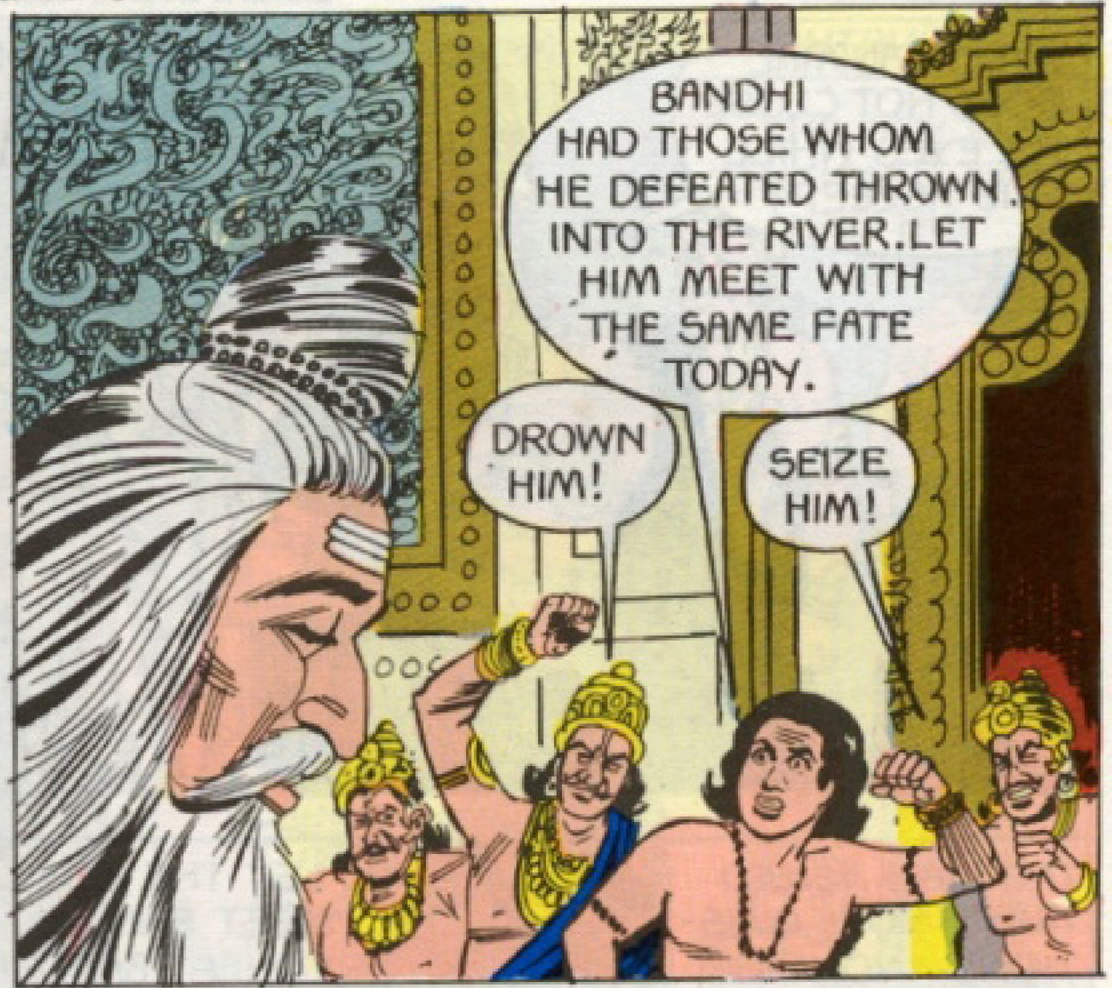

WHAT IS IT THAT DOES NOT MOVE WHEN BORN?
AN EGG.


WHICH ANIMAL DOES NOT CLOSE ITS EYES WHILE IT IS ASLEEP?
THE FISH.


THE KING ASKED MANY MORE QUESTIONS AND WAS IMPRESSED BY THE BOLD PROMPT ANSWERS.
LET THE BOY MEET BANDHI. REQUEST BANDHI TO PRESENT HIMSELF.


BANDHI CAME AND THE DEBATE BEGAN. BUT IN NO TIME ASHTAVAKRA HAD HIM IN A TIGHT CORNER AND BANDHI HAD TO ADMIT DEFEAT.



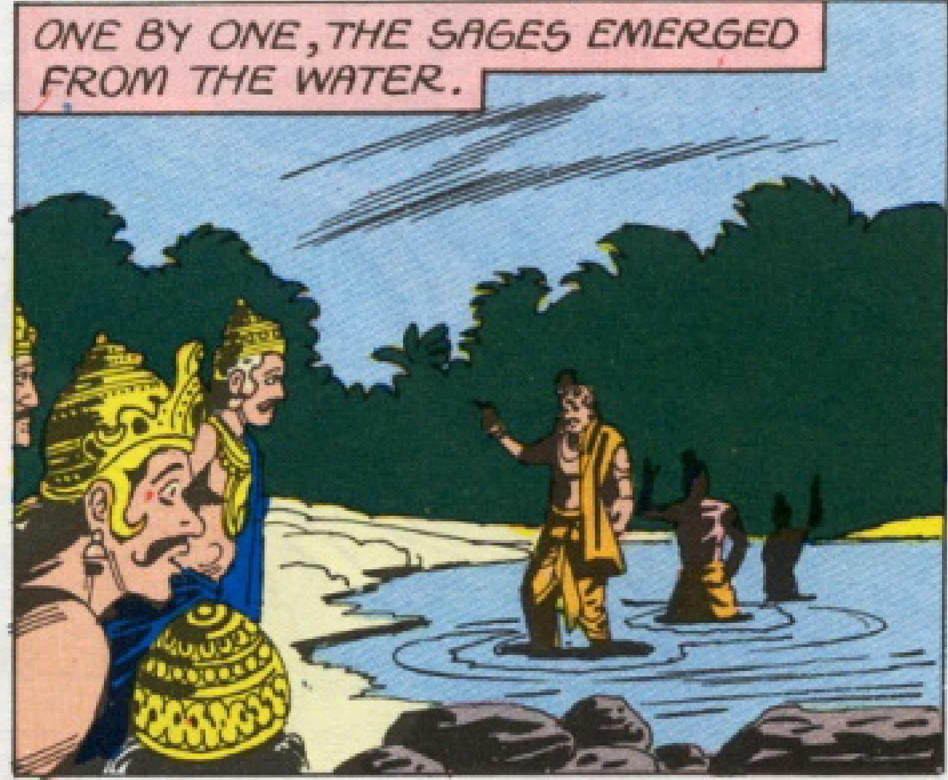






* LORD OF THE HYDROSPHERE.


AT THE RIVER—
ASHTAVAKRA WILL SOON SEE HIS LONG-LOST FATHER.


ONE BY ONE, THE SAGES EMERGED FROM THE WATER.


AS KAHODA CAME OUT—
FATHER!
ASHTAVAKRA, MY SON!


ASHTAVAKRA FELL AT THE FEET OF HIS FATHER.
MY BLESSINGS ON YOU, ASHTAVAKRA.


WE REGARD ASHTAVAKRA AS THE MOST BRILLIANT SCHOLAR AMONG US.
SONS HAVE OFTEN BEEN KNOWN TO EXCEL FATHERS IN ACHIEVEMENTS.





KAHODA, ASHTAVAKRA AND SHWETAKETU RETURNED TO THE HERMITAGE. AS SOON AS THEY ARRIVED THERE, KAHODA TOOK SUJATA AND ASHTAVAKRA TO THE RIVER FLOWING NEAR BY.

ASHTAVAKRA, TAKE A QUICK PLUNGE INTO THE RIVER AND COME OUT.

ASHTAVAKRA DID AS HE WAS TOLD. A SECOND LATER, AS HE EMERGED FROM THE WATER—

MOTHER! FATHER! LOOK! MY BODY! IT'S NO LONGER DEFORMED!

THEY WENT TO UDDALAKA.

LOOK FATHER! ASHTAVAKRA'S BODY IS NO LONGER DEFORMED!

UDDALAKA REJOICED TO SEE HIS GRANDSON'S BODY STRAIGHT AND TALL. THE HERMITAGE ONCE AGAIN BECAME THE HAVEN OF PEACE IT USED TO BE.



Illustrated Classics From India

Dhruva and Ashtavakra

The story of Dhruva is taken from the Bhagawat Purana. Dhruva was barely five years old when he performed penance to win the favour of Lord Narayana (Vishnu). Pleased with the faith of the child, Vishnu appeared before him and told him that he would rule the earth for 36,000 years and then occupy a very important place in heaven. And sure enough, to this day, Dhruva resides in the sky as the Pole star, referred to by many Hindus as the "Dhruva Tara" or "Dhruva Nakshatra".

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The story of Ashtavakra is taken from the Mahabharata. While in exile, the Pandava princes, accompanied by Sage Lomasha, visited a number of holy places. When they reached the hermitage of Shwetaketu the sage told them the story of Ashtavakra, the nephew of Shwetaketu, who was born with eight physical deformities and overcame all odds with the gift of knowledge and sheer perseverance.

Editor: Anant Pai

Script: Shailaja Ganguly and Malati Shenoy **Illustrations: Ram Waeerkar**
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